

# **Research on Decentralization in East and Southern Africa**

**John Kiyaga-Nsubuga**

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## **Introduction**

This paper provides an overview of the current directions in research on decentralization and local governance in East and Southern Africa. The last two decades have witnessed a sharp rise in interest among academicians, donors and practitioners in decentralization of power to local governments, because of the significant potential this developmental approach has for effective provision of services and alleviation of poverty. Due to the failure of earlier post-independence state-centric approaches to deliver most of the promised socio-economic benefits, development re-thinking has led to the proliferation of initiatives to give local communities a bigger say in decision making over matters that affect them directly. These initiatives have been broad ranging – encompassing, among other things, setting up local government institutions and legal frameworks, sensitizing local government officials on their roles and functions, and building local government capacities through training and tooling – and have led to expenditure of large amounts of money. On the whole, the balance sheet is mixed. While there are some countries where significant political and fiscal decentralization has made a real difference in the way public affairs are managed (albeit still with a myriad of operational problems), such as in Uganda, there are others, such as Swaziland, where decentralization of political and financial power is still at an incipient stage.<sup>1</sup> It is this mixed picture that has generated considerable research interest to establish the state of local governance in sub-Saharan African countries following extensive interventions by numerous donors, NGOs, central governments and other stakeholders. Though considerable, this research is yet to build a solid picture of the state of local governance in sub-Saharan Africa, largely because most of the research efforts are uncoordinated.

The purpose of this paper is to hint on some of the important areas in which research on decentralization and local governance has been directed with regard to Eastern and Southern Africa, and to suggest other potential research areas that could be considered for

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of these contrasts see: Jesper Steffensen and Svend Trollegaard, **Fiscal Decentralization and Sub-National Government Finance in Relation to Infrastructure and Service Provision: Synthesis Report on 6 Sub-Saharan African Country Studies** (May 2000).

support. The paper is organized in five sections. Section one discusses the background to decentralization in sub-Saharan Africa, with reference to the role of the state in development management. Section two highlights the current issues in local governance in sub-Saharan Africa. Section three draws attention to some of the country and regional research that has been conducted, again to highlight the topical issues. Section four draws attention to the differences in donor research interests. Finally, section five provides a summary of what I consider other important areas that should be considered for research support.

### **Decentralization and the State in sub-Saharan Africa**

The general experience of African local governance in the post-independence period has been one of over-centralization of power. The origins of this phenomenon can be traced to the universal preference by all colonial authorities to maintain absolute control over their subjects, and to subsequent popularization of the argument that newly independent states with diverse ethnic groups and severe regional imbalances had to be firmly controlled from the center to prevent them from fragmenting due to pressures occasioned by rapid social change.<sup>2</sup>

Local administration in most of these countries was exercised through deconcentrated structures that had been inherited from the colonial period without modification. Devolution of power was not really considered feasible because of several factors. First, the new states were characterized by extensive poverty and weak structures and, given their severe manpower shortages and lack of previous experience, could not realistically be expected to manage local governance effectively. Second, local authorities had developed a deep-seated dependency mentality due to long exposure to centralized control, which they could not shake off easily. Third, the local population had all along been politically marginalized and had not developed the necessary civic competence to hold public officials to account. Fourth, it was felt that decentralization would reinforce

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<sup>2</sup> See: Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Yale University Press, 1968).

inherited inequalities, which only centralized governance could correct. Finally, the leaders themselves considered the state absolutely essential for generating and sustaining large investments and providing welfare benefits in education, health and other sectors, and were more than prepared to accord it primacy in all juridical, political and financial matters.<sup>3</sup>

Even when efforts were made to change the mode of governance, this was done for political reasons, and not necessarily to improve efficiency or to give local communities power over resource allocation. For example, local communities were not consulted during the design of Tanzania's unsuccessful 'villagization' programme of the early 1970s, which was supposed to have been in their interest. In neighboring Kenya, power was decentralized to districts by President Moi primarily to weaken the clientelist structure that had been set up by his predecessor – Jomo Kenyatta<sup>4</sup>.

The recent revival of interest in decentralization has been primarily triggered by the failure of the post-independence African state to carry out its developmental role effectively and to satisfy the huge demand created by rising expectations. Mounting donor pressure due to frustration with the state-centric development approaches that were earlier adopted by most post independence African governments, coupled with internal pressure for democratization, generated a groundswell in favor of decentralization that African governments found hard to resist. Today the debate is not on whether to decentralization but on *how* to decentralize, with increasing emphasis being placed on devolution of power to popularly elected local governments so that they can make independent planning, budgeting, financial and development management decisions for the benefit of their communities. The role of the state has changed from that of a direct

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<sup>3</sup> See: John Martinussen, *Society, State and Market: A Guide to Competing Theories of Development* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1997); and James Manor, *The Political Economy of Democratic Decentralization* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Joel D. Barkan and Michael Chege, 'Decentralising the State: District Focus and the Politics of Reallocation in Kenya', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27(3), 1989: 431-453.

provider of social benefits to that of creator of an enabling environment for other players, including local governments, to do the social provisioning.

Due to the recency of decentralized governance as a developmental approach in the African context, it is still not clear how the diverse approaches that have been undertaken in different countries are paying off, or what bottlenecks stand in their way. This paper discusses some of the research that has been undertaken in this area, and points to what else may generate more information to obtain a more comprehensive picture and a better understanding of the way forward.

### **Current Issues in Africa's Experience with Decentralisation**

#### *Discussion Fora*

Because Africa's experience with decentralisation is fairly recent, and also because decentralisation is taking place in the context of severe economic hardship for most countries, a number of governance<sup>5</sup> issues have come to the fore. These have been subjected to extensive debate at several fora, including the *African Union of Local Authorities (AULA) Conference* which took place in Kampala, Uganda, in October 4 – 8, 1999; the *Africities 2 Summit* which took place in Windhoek, Namibia, on May 15 – 20, 2000; and the currently ongoing *Africa Local Government Action Forum (ALGAF)* which is discussing local government issues by video-conference.

According to the AULA conference, the main bottlenecks against effective decentralization in Africa are (i) inadequate political will at the level of legislations (ii) persistent poverty (iii) internal and external security (iv) rapid urbanization (v) the negative impact of globalization and (iv) inadequate human capacity at local government level. The papers that were presented addressed several concerns including the

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<sup>5</sup> By 'governance' I mean "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels". This definition is provided by the UNDP in *UNDP, Governance for Sustainable Human Development* (See: <http://magnet.undp.org/policy/summary.htm>, p.3).

incorporation of marginalized groups (youth, women, the elderly and disabled) into local government agenda, lack of capacity in human resource management and development planning, the role of local governments in poverty alleviation, challenges of urban development, local government financing, and the interaction between the public and private sectors.

The Africities 2 summit followed an earlier one that had taken place in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in 1998<sup>6</sup>. The Windhoek conference was jointly organized by the Municipal Development Programme (MDP) and AULA with funding from multiple donors, and was attended by over 1,300 delegates. It was organized under the theme “*Financing African Local Government to Strengthen Democracy and Sustainable Development*”, with four sub-themes, namely: economic policies and sustainable local development; reinforcing African local government resources mobilization capacity; funding infrastructure and urban services partnership; and African local governments’ access to loans and financial markets.

Among its several recommendations the most significant were that (i) local governments should adopt more robust management to promote effective local economic development (ii) there was urgent need to develop local information systems (iii) local authorities should give priority to the improvement of the quality of life and work of local economic actors (iv) local authorities should promote participative models of governance (v) central governments should enact enabling legislative frameworks to ensure attainment of the goals of decentralization and development, and should match devolved responsibilities with adequate resources, and (vii) that donors should go beyond the exclusively sector approach to development, promote coherence between economic sectors and activities, and revisit the arbitrary division between urban and rural projects and programs.

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<sup>6</sup> The Abidjan summit, which was attended by over 1,000 municipal management and urban development actors, including three hundred mayors and some ministers, broadly addressed the challenges of decentralization, local development and decentralized cooperation in Africa.

Recently dialogue has been started among academics, donors and local government practitioners and other stakeholders as a follow-up on the Africities 2 Summit. Participants discuss topical issues on local governance once a month during a three-hour video-conference session, which will be followed by internet 'chat' over the same issues. This initiative is sponsored by MDP and the World Bank Institute and is coordinated by the Uganda Management Institute. The issues around which the discussion is structured relate to local government capacity and funding, as well as good governance for effective and efficient service delivery.

### *Studies*

In addition to the above discussion fora, several studies have also been conducted to assess the progress of decentralization in several countries. Some of the studies have targeted individual countries while others have compared several countries on key identified indicators. I will draw attention to four of these studies here to give an indication of the issues that have come to fore.

A study by Arsene Balihuta<sup>7</sup> investigated the capacity of local governments in the targeted urban areas to provide the necessary public goods and services in order to promote development; it also analyzed the causes of the low capacity of those urban governments and how that capacity could be enhanced. Field research was conducted during which 114 randomly selected residents were interviewed. 'Capacity' was defined in terms of leadership, administrative and technical competence; adequacy of administrative buildings, transport and office equipment; and revenue sufficiency. The views expressed by respondents were then supplemented with information supplied by urban authorities on those same indicators.

The study found that the selected urban local governments lacked financial, administrative, technical, institutional capacity to successfully handle their devolved responsibilities, and this was attributed to "lack of sufficient revenue, corruption,

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<sup>7</sup> Arsene Balihuta, *the Capacity of Local Government to Promote Economic Development: A case study of Kampala, Jinja, Soroti, Arua, Luwero and Ibanda* (August 25 - November 30, 1998) 47p.

inefficiency, lack of qualified and experienced administrative and technical manpower, poverty, poor leadership, mismanagement and embezzlement in that order of descending importance” (p.44). What was required, from the point of view of respondents, was increased fiscal transfer from central to urban governments, provision of construction equipment to urban governments, assistance to urban governments to attract investors to their areas, more training for urban governments’ staff, more effective monitoring of urban councils’ activities, less corruption and improved security. The initiative was overwhelmingly expected by respondents to come from the central government.

The study recommended that (i) urban councils should sensitize their people to understand that decentralization places development initiative on the local councils themselves; (ii) urban governments should levy property and user charges to boost their revenue; (iii) central government should permit urban councils to share some of the indirect tax revenue generated from their areas; (iv) urban local governments should be permitted to use their physical assets as collateral to secure loans; (v) corruption, mismanagement, inefficiency and embezzlement in urban local governments should be fought aggressively (vi) urban government should use construction equipment in a pool rather than operate independent sets of equipment as this is not cost effective; and (vii) that central government should pay the salaries of certain categories of urban government staff, like it does for district local governments.

Another study by William Muhumuza<sup>8</sup> investigated the causes of friction between urban and district local governments in Uganda, and what could be done to improve urban - district local government relations to facilitate smooth implementation of Uganda’s decentralization program. The study was conducted in Mpigi district and Kampala City Council (KCC), both of which are adjacent to each other. Primary data and information was gathered through in depth interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation and

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<sup>8</sup> William Muhumuza, *Managing the Interface Between Urban and District Councils in Uganda* (August 1999), 49p.



analysis of minutes of meeting, official reports, research papers, media reports, existing laws, dissertations and published materials. Responses from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were analyzed using content analysis and frequency tabulations.

The research identified several issues that frequently strained relations between Mpigi District Administration (MDA) and KCC, the most prominent being inequitable sharing of revenue between them, disagreement over how to tax Mpigi residents who work daily in Kampala, Kampala's continuous expansion into Mpigi District, and continuous disposal of Kampala's garbage into land fills located in Mpigi district. Muhumuza's study attributed these conflicts primarily to weaknesses in the Local Governments Act, 1977 which defines the relationship between various level of local governments.

Interestingly, another study on two adjacent local governments in South Africa also draws attention to structural relations as a major cause of tensions between them.<sup>9</sup> This study was undertaken "to identify salient issues that affect the relationship between urban and rural municipalities and to explore means of harmonizing this relationship". Two neighbouring rural and urban areas in the Western Gauteng Services Council (which is situated in Western side of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council) were studied – the urban council of Krugersdorp, approximately 45 km west of Johannesburg, and the rural council of Magaliesberg, situated north-west of Krugersdorp. The study identified, through structured interviews, the following issues which had frequently led to constant friction between both local governments.

- a) The rural council of Magaliesberg believes that it is disadvantaged in comparison to the urban council of Krugersdorp because of the latter's greater influence on the District Council in which both are situated. This disadvantage is perceived to manifest itself in intergovernmental transfers which favour

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<sup>9</sup> Emendo Inc. Town and Regional Planners and Gemey Adams, *Managing the Interface Between Municipalities and Their Surrounding District Council of South Africa Case Study in the Western Gauteng Services Council* (March 2000), 40 p.

Krugersdorp, and the fact that Krugersdorp is supposed to play “bigger brother” to Magaliesberg in planning matters. Although resource allocation should be based on population, land area and special needs, in reality it is in reality determined by power and influence.

- b) Magaliesberg council is incensed by the constant invasion of prime land on the urban periphery by urban development, often without much concern for environmental implications.
- c) Urban residents with far better and more social infrastructure (i.e. schools, clinics) easily access Magaliesberg’s rural facilities whereas Magaliesberg residents find it difficult to access urban facilities.
- d) Rural councils have little say on how money collected from their area is utilised since it is districts that are mandated to distribute revenue within their local governments.
- e) Rural councils feel incapacitated in human and material resources to deliver quality services to their rural communities. The pretext often used for their under-funding is that they have sparse populations.
- f) Industrial waste and sewer effluent from the urban council end up into streams flowing into rural areas, creating an environmental hazard and reducing available irrigation water for rural farmers.

The study recommended that: (i) as rural council become up-graded they should be given more of the powers that are vested in district councils due to lack of capacity at lower levels (ii) higher order governments should introduce continuous re-skilling programmes to build capacities in lower councils (iii) district councils should enter into management agreements with lower councils to give them a stake in land use matters (iv) consultative

mechanisms should be developed to provide constant channels of communication (v) it may ultimately be advisable to absorb rural councils into nearby urban councils to generate better resource distribution, land-use planning and service delivery.

The most comprehensive research on decentralisation in sub-Saharan Africa is the recent six-nation comparative study on the relationship between fiscal decentralisation and local government finance, on the one hand, and infrastructure and service provision, on the other. The study titled **Fiscal Decentralisation and Sub-National Government Finance in Relation to Infrastructure and Service Provision** targeted Zambia, Senegal, Swaziland, Ghana, and Zimbabwe and investigated how the six countries compared on (i) central government policy on decentralisation (ii) financial sustainability at the sub-national government level (iii) performance and sustainability of infrastructure and service provision (iv) regulatory framework (v) institutional framework (vi) subsidiarity-operational capacity in relation to sub-national government tasks, and (vii) sub-national government accountability to their citizens. The study, whose results were published in the first half of 2000, was carried out under the auspices of the World Bank, the National Association of Local Authorities of Denmark (NALAD), United States Aid for international Development (USAID) and local consultants, with funding from USAID and the Danish Trust Fund.<sup>10</sup>

According to the study, the objective of this regional research effort was to:

- a. facilitate identification of priorities within each case study country with reference to the most appropriate systems, procedures and processes for decentralisation
- b. foster cross-national learning of best practices in decentralisation with relation to infrastructure and service provision, and
- c. to enable private and public investors and the donor community to identify future needs and investment possibilities in infrastructure and service provision at the

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<sup>10</sup> The study is expressed in seven thick volume, one country study for each of the six countries, and a synthesis report. In the study 'Sub-national government' means the same thing as local government'

local level, and future viable projects in administrative and human resource capacity building.<sup>11</sup>

A regional approach of this kind was thought to have both analytical and organisation benefits. On the analytical side, it was expected to generate crucial data and information on infrastructure investment requirements, municipal finance systems, and relevant reforms in each of the six countries. On the organisational side, it would enable governments and donors to share information and programme assistance more efficiently over a longer time period in light of each country's needs, and it would facilitate development of municipal markets through sharing of information on specific activities and reforms being undertaken in different countries, and provide a focal point for private investors seeking to invest in infrastructure and service provision.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of its findings, the study concluded that all six countries had made important initiatives in the six indicators on which they were compared, though with varying progress as indicated in the table below:

What the above discussion for and research directions indicate is that the issues at the centre of decentralization in sub-Saharan Africa revolve around capacity building and adequate funding for local governments, as well as the legal framework that defines relations between central and local governments, on the one hand, and between local governments themselves, on the other. Capacity building needs to embrace all sectors to enable local governments to function effectively and efficiently, with particular emphasis on strengthening financial management, budgeting, development planning, human resource management, monitoring and evaluation, training needs assessment and revenue

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<sup>11</sup> Francis Appiah et al; **Fiscal Decentralisation and Sub-national government Finance in Relation to Infrastructure and Service Provision in Ghana: A Collaborative Study between the National Association of Local Authorities in Denmark (NALAD) and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) Ghana** (March, 2000) p.9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp 8, 13 – 15

collection mechanism. And, of course, intergovernmental fiscal transfers must be increased to match devolved responsibilities.

The donor community and some UN agencies have sponsored several research efforts interventions to determine the direction in which decentralization is moving, although a comprehensive picture is yet to emerge. Below I give some indication of the various research areas in which donors are interested. The compilation leans heavily on the Ugandan experience and should therefore be treated as only indicative.

## Donor Research Support

<b>Donor/ Agency</b>	<b>Project Area/ Title</b>
Ford Foundation	<b>The quest for Good Governance: Decentralization and Civil Society in Uganda</b>  Sub-topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Human resource development and management in Uganda</li> <li>(b) Role of NGOs in the delivery of water services</li> <li>(c) The role of traditional rulers in the promotion of good governance in Uganda</li> <li>(d) The role of district councils in the decentralization programme in Uganda</li> <li>(e) Financing decentralization for the good governance of Uganda</li> </ul>
DFID	<b>Managing the Transition to Democracy in Uganda Under the National Resistance Movement</b>  Sub-topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) The role of representative institutions in the transition to democracy in Uganda</li> <li>(b) The role of international agencies in the transition to democracy in Uganda</li> <li>(c) The military and transition in Uganda: Neutralising the use of force</li> <li>(d) Civil service and parastatal reforms in the transition to democracy in Uganda</li> <li>(e) Legal and Organisational challenges in the state structure in the transition to democracy in Uganda</li> <li>(f) The role of parties, pressure groups and civil society associations in the transition to democracy in Uganda</li> </ul>
USAID	<b>Political Institutions and Governance</b>
DANIDA	<b>Effects of decentralization reform in Uganda</b>
UNDP	<b>What makes markets tick: Local Governance and Service Delivery in Uganda</b>
IRS/World Bank	<b>Decentralization, Governance and Delivery of Public Services</b>
Rockefeller Foundation	<b>Decentralization and Human Resource demand: Assessment from the Perspective of the District</b>
UNCRD	<b>Decentralization and Citizen Participation (Zambia, Ghana, Uganda, Namibia, Ethiopia, Botswana and Kenya)</b>
Friedrich Ebert Foundation	<b>Conference on Local Self Governance and Peoples' Participation: Preconditions for Peace and Stability (March 26-28, 1996)</b>

MDP	Interface between urban and rural (district) local governments (Uganda)
	Capacity for Local Governments to provide social services (Uganda)

Given the multiplicity of issues raised above ((i.e. the discussion fora on local governance, the research themes and the governance areas favored by various donors and agencies) there is clear need for coordination of research efforts to generate a comprehensive body of knowledge on the current state and future direction of local governance in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. The studies done already need to be reinforced and updated because of the rapidly changing circumstances under which local governments are operating. Additionally, there is urgent need for extending research into areas that have hitherto not received adequate attention.

### **Potential Research Areas**

The issues raised in the above sections suggest that Africa's decentralisation process thus far has registered significant advances but is at the same time facing considerable challenges. The progress that has been made differs from country to country and from governance area to governance area. That notwithstanding, there are a number of identifiable areas which require deeper investigation in order to identify bottlenecks that prevent policy objectives from being translated into expected outcomes, and to identify good practices that can be emulated by various practitioners in order to shorten learning processes and to spread the benefits of decentralisation as widely as possible. I outline the potential research areas below, in order of importance.

- (1) A great deal of intervention has been made by various players in order to raise the capacity of local governments to perform their mandated functions under decentralised governance, but the impact of this intervention is yet to be established. It is, therefore, not easy to determine the most cost-effective way of undertaking further capacity building, or even the areas of most need. Uganda's case is instructive, especially given that Uganda is now considered to have



advanced further in a number of areas of decentralisation governance than most African countries.

Since 1993 a broad range of capacity building efforts have been made by the Uganda Ministry of Local Government, other Central Government Ministries, NGOs, donor countries and agencies (principally DANIDA, World Bank, Irish Aid, the European Union and the governments of Belgium and the Netherlands) to develop and strengthen the ability of local governments to execute their mandated responsibilities.

The interventions and approaches used by different stakeholders have differed significantly. Line ministries with district based programmes (Education and Sports; Health; Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries; Works, Housing and Communication and Water, Lands and Environment) have tended to focus on programmes that aim at improving accountability and value for money in the utilisation of public resources. NGOs and donor countries or agencies with district-based programmes have also tended to stress strengthening financial management systems, planning processes, budgeting and leadership skill; improving the quality of life for the rural people; and rehabilitating and improving infrastructure.

For its part the Ministry of Local Government has taken a broader approach involving sensitisation of local government councillors on their roles, powers and functions under the Constitution and the Local Government Act, 1997; induction courses for members of Local Government statutory boards; skills development courses for specific technical personnel (accounts technicians, administrative officers, trainers of trainers; district planners, etc.); and production and distribution of handbooks, guides, manuals and regulations.

What is not clear is the extent to which all the interventions highlighted above have succeeded in addressing the capacity needs of Uganda's local government

system. In the absence of comprehensive and readily accessible information on the scope and depth of the capacity building efforts that have been undertaken to date, it is difficult to accurately determine what further intervention is required nation-wide. In 1998 the Ministry of Local Government made a "data map" on NGO and donor district activities, but the information it contained was inadequate, scanty and is now outdated. To-date no local government "capacity building map" has been assembled to give definitive indication of the state of national capacity requirements to support the decentralisation implementation process further. The information available on capacity building in local governments is scattered in the data banks of various stakeholders and is therefore unusable by stakeholders. Thus, a comprehensive national picture of the capacity building efforts that have been made to date, as well as their effectiveness in addressing their stated objective, needs to be established to ensure that further intervention is directed to areas of most need. This will minimise duplication and overlap and lead to more uniform distribution of capacity building efforts in the local government system.

- 2 There are bottlenecks in policy implementation at local level that cannot be wholly attributed to capacity constraints. Some of these relate to conflicting or inappropriate legislation, structures, institutions and roles. In some cases it may be attitudes that are the main culprit, while in others it may be defective management information systems. All this needs to be investigated and appropriate measures designed in order to ensure effective policy implementations at local government.
- 3 It is generally agreed that local governments in Africa are not receiving enough resources from the centre to handle their devolved responsibilities. But how are they coping with unfunded mandates? Obviously they must be improvising in a number of innovative ways in order to cope with adversity. These innovative

coping mechanisms need to be understood because they could provide important local solutions to complex service provision problems.

- 4 It is often assumed that it is only local governments that require capacity building. In reality, most central governments in Africa are ill-prepared for effective oversight over decentralisation implementation. Many have weak management information systems, have problems with policy formulation and analysis, and are yet to establish effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Against this background, it is necessary to determine the exact capacity needs that central governments require, and to establish the political, attitudinal and other bottlenecks that may impinge on the capacity of central governments to effectively carry out their oversight functions in decentralised governance.
- 5 Considering that most decentralization programmes are heavily donor supported it is essential to find out how to make them sustainable. Comparative studies need to be conducted to garner insights from successfully implemented and self-sustaining projects.
- 6 Over ten years ago Barkan and Chege asked; "What is the political logic which both the opportunities for and the limits to decentralisation?"<sup>13</sup> What they were drawing attention to, and which is prevalent in all African cases, is the tension between the desire for decentralisation, on one hand, and the necessity of control from the centre, on the other. While local governments tend to interpret decentralisation in terms of increasing autonomy (even absolute independence) from central government, central governments tend to want to maintain a significant measure of control over local governments, as evidenced by their universal reluctance to devolve most of the development resources to local governments. The question is, how can centre-local relations be structured so that they address central government fears of losing control altogether while facilitating collaborative efforts between both levels towards local development?

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<sup>13</sup> Joel d Baker and Michael Chege, "Decentralising the state; District focus and the policies of reallocation in Kenya; *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27 (3), 1989: 434.

- 7 To a very large extent decentralised governance initiatives in many African countries are driven by donor support. Some donor agencies, such as the World Bank, channel their resources through central government, while others, especially bilateral ones, tend to channel their funds through district-based (or regional-based) programmes that are largely executed by NGOs. This poses an enormous co-ordination problem for most central governments and leads to duplication and overlap, in addition to promoting uneven development. It is essential to establish the donor co-ordination mechanisms in place and why they are not functioning optimally in order to design effective ones. This also requires to examine donor policies, objectives, project implementation guidelines and reporting formats in order to identify areas of possible harmonisation with country – specific decentralisation implementation programmes and processes. The same, of course needs to be done for the NGOs.

The potential research areas identified above are only indicative. Research could be supported individually or collaboratively on stand-alone or interconnected themes. There is also merit in supporting doctoral research in key areas in order to generate a growing pool of local experts on critical aspects of decentralised government in Africa.

